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“Empires of the Mind”? C.K. Ogden, Winston Churchill and Basic English

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Résumé de l'article

Cette étude analyse la relation qui a existé entre le Cabinet de Guerre de Churchill, en particulier le premier ministre lui-même, et la version simplifiée de l'anglais mise au point par C. K. Ogden (1889-1957) et connue sous le nom de *Basic English* (l'anglais de base).

Ogden a créé cette langue élémentaire pour tous à la fin des années 1920. Depuis ses études de premier cycle universitaire, il était obsédé par la langue et la sémantique, et les horreurs de la Première Guerre mondiale avaient renforcé cette obsession. La langue qu'il a créée n'a été que l'une des nombreuses tentatives faites au tournant du siècle pour créer une langue universelle.

Le *Basic English* (l'anglais de base) de Ogden a connu un certain succès dans les années 1930. Mais c'est la Deuxième Guerre mondiale qui va constituer sa véritable épreuve. Churchill semble avoir été attiré par la facilité d'utilisation de cette langue. Il y a d'abord vu un moyen de communications pratique pour les Alliés de langues différentes.

Puis il a entrevu les avantages que présenterait la langue de Ogden dans la période de décolonisation dans laquelle il était contraint de s'engager. Il n'était pas sans espérer aussi que le *Basic English* puisse entretenir une forme d'impérialisme intellectuel qu'il voyait disparaître à regret.

On a continué à promouvoir et à enseigner le *Basic English*. Mais le grand projet du gouvernement Churchill concernant cette langue a pris fin avec la défaite de ce gouvernment, à l'été de 1945.

"Empires of the Mind"? C.K. Ogden, Winston Churchill and Basic English

K.E. Garay

Résumé:

This paper examines the relationship of Churchill's War Cabinet, and in particular of the prime minister himself, to a simplified version of English devised by C.K. Ogden (1889-1957). "Basic English" was developed by Ogden during the late 1920s, the result of an obsession with language and meaning which dated from his undergraduate days, and which was reinforced by the horrors of the First World War. "Basic" was but one of many attempts to devise a universal language made during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Following some minor successes during the 1930s, the real testing time for Basic was to come during the Second World War. Churchill seems to have been first attracted by the language's simple utility. He saw it as providing an easily learned medium of communication between the polyglot wartime allies, but he soon began to glimpse its potentially wider benefits for the postimperial era he was reluctantly being forced to enter. Nor was the possibility that Basic might foster a form of intellectual imperialism lost upon the scheme's enemies.

While Basic English continues to be promoted and taught, the fall of Churchill's government in the summer of 1945 ensured that his grand design for Basic would never be realized.

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Cette étude analyse la relation qui a existé entre le Cabinet de Guerre de Churchill, en particulier le premier ministre lui-même, et la version simplifiée de l'anglais mise au point par C.K. Ogden (1889-1957) et connue sous le nom de Basic English *(l'anglais de base). Ogden a créé cette langue élémentaire pour tous à la fin des années 1920. Depuis ses études de premier cycle universitaire, il était obsédé par la langue et la sémantique, et les horreurs de la Première Guerre mondiale avaient renforcé cette obsession. La langue qu'il a créée n'a été que l'une des nombreuses tentatives faites au tournant du siècle pour créer une langue universelle.*

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d'abord vu un moyen de communications pratique pour les Alliés de langues différentes. Puis il a entrevu les avantages que présenterait la langue de Ogden dans la période de décolonisation dans laquelle il était contraint de s'engager. Il n'était pas sans espérer aussi que le Basic English *puisse entretenir une forme d'impérialisme intellectuel qu'il voyait disparaître à regret.*

On a continué à promouvoir et à enseigner le Basic English. *Mais le grand projet du gouvernement Churchill concernant cette langue a pris fin avec la défaite de ce gouvernment, à l'été de 1945.*

On 6 September 1943 Winston Churchill was awarded an honorary degree at Harvard University. He used the occasion to deliver a typically resonant and stirring speech on Anglo-American unity. The speaker, "a child of both worlds," referred to the nations' shared love of personal freedom "or as Kipling put it: 'Leave to live by no man's leave underneath the law'," and to the "gift of a common tongue" which "may well some day become the foundation of a common citizenship." But Churchill went further than merely praising this "priceless inheritance" of the English language.

> I do not see why we should not try to spread our common language even more widely throughout the globe and, without seeking selfish advantage over any, possess ourselves of this invaluable amenity and birthright.
>
> Some months ago I persuaded the Ministers to study and report upon Basic English. Here you have a plan. There are others but here you have a very carefully wrought plan for an international language capable of a very wide transaction of practical business and interchange of ideas. The whole of it is composed in about 650 nouns and 200 verbs or other parts of speech — no more indeed than can be written on one side of a single sheet of paper.[1]

What was this concept which the British prime minister, the Macaulayan master of winged words, was so enthusiastically championing? This paper will briefly trace the genesis and development of Basic English. This, in turn, requires a survey of the career of the man who devised and devoted his life to it, C.K. Ogden. It will then examine the fortunes of Basic English during the crucial years of the Second World War, with particular attention to Churchill's personal involvement in the scheme, in an attempt to define the nature of his attraction to such an unlikely-seeming cause.

C.K. Ogden (1889-1957) seems first to have been drawn to the idea of a universal language during the First World War, although his preoccupation with language and his researches into it had begun even earlier, during his undergraduate years at Magdalene College, Cambridge.[2] Between 1914 and 1918, as editor of the *Cambridge Magazine* he

1. Winston S. Churchill, *Onwards to Victory: War Speeches by the Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill*, comp. by Charles Eade (Boston, 1944), 235-37.
2. On Ogden's early career and the influence of Victoria, Lady Welby, see W. Terrence Gordon, "Significs and C.K. Ogden: The Influence of Lady Welby," in *Essays on Significs. Papers Presented on the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of Lady Welby (1837-1912)*, ed. Walker H. Schmitz (Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 1989), 179-96.

transformed a parochial university weekly into an internationally recognized (and nationally criticised) organ of dissent, prompting A.J.P. Taylor to rank him among the period's more influential "troublemakers."[3] Not himself a pacifist, Ogden, through his columns, unswervingly championed the rights of those who were, and made eloquent pleas for international understanding which, once achieved, he felt certain would bring the carnage to an end.[4]

Harmony between nations would be impossible, Ogden reasoned, without a common language to facilitate effortless communication and unambiguous mutual comprehension. By 1920 he had become convinced that "the spread of English will extinguish the possibility of war"[5] and by the end of the decade, deviating only to complete, with I.A. Richards, the trail-blazing study of language and comprehension *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), he had formulated the simplified version of English which he spent the rest of his life promulgating.

Basic English, as Ogden defined it, "is a selection of 850 English words, used in simple structural patterns, which is both an international auxiliary language and a self-contained first stage for the teaching of any form of wider or Standard English."[6] Ogden's concept was, however, more than a mere word list; idioms were to be eliminated as were most verbs, since for Ogden, as for Bentham, whose works on language he had studied closely,[7] verbs were "slippery eels" and liable to cause linguistic difficulties. Instead of verbs Ogden admitted 18 "operators" into his list: only "come" and "go," "give" and "get," "put" and "take," and 12 others were permitted. These operators, along with the remaining 832 carefully selected words, must fulfill the function of the normal twenty-thousand-word English vocabulary.[8] Amazingly, despite a certain blandness and an occasional circumlocution, when used by a skilled practitioner Basic is often indistinguishable from "normal" English.

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3. A.J.P. Taylor, *The Troublemakers: Dissent Over Foreign Policy, 1792-1939* (London, 1957), 134-35.
4. The author has examined Ogden's dissenting opinion on the war in a paper, "Pacifism or Dissent? C.K. Ogden's *Cambridge Magazine*, 1914-1918," presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Hamilton, June 1987.
5. The quotation is from an unpublished manuscript, tentatively dated 1921 in the C.K. Ogden Archive, Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. The manuscript was probably composed between 1920 and 1923.
6. Ogden's own definition, as cited by Yorwerth Davies, "Basic English," *The Guardian*, 26 March 1963.
7. Bentham's profound influence upon Ogden and his formative role in the shaping of Basic English is evident from the many articles in *Psyche* by Ogden on Bentham's work. See, for example, "Forensic Orthology: Back to Bentham," and "Bentham on the Verb," in *Psyche* 8:4 (1927-28): 3-18 and 19-40. See also *Psyche* 9:1 (1928-29): 4-14, 15-24 and ff. Ogden also edited Bentham's *Theory of Legislation* (London, 1931) and his *Theory of Fictions* (London, 1932).
8. The full word list appears, among other places, as a fold-out sheet facing the title page of *Basic English* (London, 1930).

The elements of Basic were first revealed in the philosophical journal *Psyche* which Ogden edited during the 1920s.[9] In 1927 he opened the Orthological Institute in London to serve as a centre for linguistic research and a headquarters for the promotion of Basic, and the system was fully expounded in a series of six books published between 1930 and 1935.[10] Yet for all the patent virtues of the fully developed concept, the world did not beat a path to the institute's doors. Grants from the Payne Fund and the Rockefeller Foundation in the United States[11] served to keep the scheme alive but came nowhere close to providing the funding needed to teach and disseminate Basic on the international scale for which it had been designed.

One reason for Basic's lack of recognition during the 1930s was its relatively late emergence upon the international language scene. From the time of the pioneering efforts of Bishop Wilkins in the seventeenth century,[12] a succession of schemes, running the gamut from the merely eccentric to the blatantly bizarre, had appeared and, just as quickly, disappeared. Almost as if they could foresee, while the politicians and generals could not, the international conflicts looming before them, the linguistic innovators had been particularly active during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for it was this period which saw the invention of Volapük (1879), Esperanto (1887), Latino Sine Flexione (1903), Ido (1907), Occidental (1922), Novial (1922), and many others.[13] Of these Esperanto, an artificial or constructed language and therefore, so its adherents argued, more logical and easier to learn than even the most simplified existing language, had thus far achieved the greatest success, having been adopted at international conferences, used for radio broadcasts in a large number of countries, and having a substantial number of translated books in print.[14] The Esperanto movement had an estimated two thousand members in Britain during the 1930s[15] and Odgen, in the face of indifference or opposition, often came to suspect the machinations of closet Esperantists against the interests of Basic.[16]

Despite the presence of such dangerous rivals Ogden did succeed in winning over some powerful backers for Basic during the years before the outbreak of the Second

9. See the editorial sections of *Psyche* 9:4 (1928-29): 2; 9:5 (1928-29) [actually 10:1 (1929-30)]: 1-30, and 10:2 (1929-30): 1-30. In the last-cited piece, reference is made to "the task of evolving a language which is at once British, American, Scientific, International and Commercial — in a word, Basic."
10. *Basic English: A General Introduction With Rules and Grammar* (London, 1930); *A.B.C. of Basic English* (London, 1932); *The Basic Dictionary* (London, 1932); *The Basic Words* (London, 1932), and *Basic By Examples* (London, 1935).
11. Detailed information on the Payne Fund and Rockefeller grants may be found in the incoming correspondence section of the Ogden Archive at McMaster University.
12. See Andrew Large, *The Artificial Language Movement* (Oxford, 1985), 27-32.
13. Ibid., 137. Large lists fifteen new international languages devised between 1904 and 1914 alone.
14. See the figures given by F.B. Bourdillon in "Esperanto," *Service in Life and Work* 1:3 (Autumn 1932): 31-32.
15. Large, *The Artificial Language Movement*, 106.
16. See the several references in Ogden's correspondence with Sir Percy Ashley, outgoing correspondence, Ogden Archive, McMaster University.

World War: G.B. Shaw, Julian Huxley, and H.G. Wells were among those who signed a declaration that they would "welcome any provision for its practical application, especially . . . for the establishment of closer relations with the peoples of Africa and the East."[17] In his futuristic novel, *The Shape of Things to Come*, Wells also made Basic "the official medium of communication throughout the world by the Air and Sea Control, and by 2020 there was hardly anyone in the World who could not talk and understand it."[18]

Finally in 1939, following protracted correspondence with the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office, the British government finally permitted itself to take some official interest in Ogden's idea. A committee was set up to investigate the possibilities of Basic but it was appointed only a few days before war broke out and was disbanded without having met.[19] Early in the war I.A. Richards was persuaded by the Rockefeller Foundation to leave the Orthological Institute and to continue his language work at Harvard,[20] a diversion of funds which made Ogden's financial position all the more precarious. Plagued also by shortages of staff and paper and by an excess of bombing raids and unresponsive bureaucracy, Ogden was close to despair when, with almost no prior indication of what was to come, Churchill made his Harvard speech in September of 1943.

With such wholehearted endorsement from the highest level Basic's American backers, assuming the cause to be won, at first drastically reduced and then cut off their funding.[21] All now depended upon the British government and, more particularly, upon the prime minister himself. The paradox of one whose lifelong obsession with the English language in all its glittering (and, no doubt, illogical and unteachable) manifestations being converted to a cause which would, for international purposes, limit the linguistic lexicon to a skeletal 850 words is striking, but it must be remembered that Churchill was no grandiloquent, empty orator. His speeches, which served to stir and inspire his listeners and which so exactly reflected their passions,[22] were couched in language which was magnificent in its studied simplicity. In both its spoken and its written form his eloquence derived much of its impact from the unexpected turn of the common phrase and the use of the precisely appropriate yet familiar word. Churchill

17. Fifty-two of these "Basic English Manifestos" containing 135 signatures of prominent writers and academics from around the world were auctioned (as lot #334 in part II of the sale of Ogden's papers, 12 February 1981) by Lawrence of Crewkerne, Somerset, England; see their printed catalogue.
18. H.G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* (London, 1933), 418-21.
19. See a memo prepared by Ogden entitled "Official Relations," in the Basic English files of the Ogden Archive, McMaster University. The memo indicates that unofficial negotiations with the Foreign Office had been going on since 1933 (carbon typescript, p. 4).
20. See the I.A. Richards incoming and outgoing correspondence in the Ogden Archive, McMaster University.
21. See the Rockefeller and Payne Fund correspondence in the Ogden Archive, McMaster University, and the memorial essay by Elsie Graham, "Basic English as an International Language," in *C.K. Ogden: A Collective Memoir*, ed. P. Sargant Florence and J.R.L. Anderson (London, 1977), 156-57.
22. Martin Gilbert, *Churchill's Political Philosophy* (Oxford, 1981), 10.

also waged a lifelong campaign against "meaningless formulae expressed in official jargon," pleaded for "brevity, clarity, cogency," and "urged senior officers to read Fowler's *Modern English Usage.*" Churchill was, after all, well aware that "a concern with language is by no means irrelevant to the business of politics."[23]

The most immediate appeal of Basic English for Churchill must surely have been its simple utility. He clearly appreciated the strategic value for the polyglot wartime allies of an easily acquired and unambiguous method of communication. From the first, however, there were also wider implications which the astute prime minister did not fail to grasp. While Martin Gilbert, in his analysis of Churchill's political philosophy, has presented him as the quintessential Tory Democrat, the cornerstone of whose ideology was not the blind pursuit and stubborn retention of imperial conquest but rather the stalwart defence of democratic values both in Britain and in British-controlled territory,[24] it remains undeniable that Churchill was from his youth and remained a "big Englander." After many in his own party had abandoned it, he clung to the belief that the British colonial structure was fundamentally beneficent and might be imposed, even upon unwilling subjects, if it could be demonstrated as being in their own best interests.[25]

As recently as 10 November 1942 Churchill had announced to an audience at the Mansion House: "I have not become the King's first minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire."[26] On 11 July 1943 the prime minister wrote of Basic to Sir Edward Bridges:[27]

> I am very much interested in the question of Basic English. The widespread use of this would be a gain to us far more fruitful than the annexation of great provinces. It would also fit in with my ideas of closer union with the United States by making it even more worthwhile to belong to the English-speaking club. . . . I contemplate that the B.B.C. should teach Basic English every day as part of their propaganda and generally make a big push to propagate this method of interchange of thought.[28]

The following day the matter was brought before the War Cabinet and a cabinet committee was set up.

Ogden, if he knew of it, voiced no reservations regarding what may be seen as an imperialistic element in Churchill's conversion; nor does he appear to have raised any objection to his instrument for world peace being evaluated for its usefulness in increasing the efficiency of the allied war machine. As was the case for so many who opposed the madness of the First World War, the spectre of Hitler seems to have been sufficient not only to silence any opposition from the former "troublemaker" but also to enlist him, intellectually at least, in the ranks.

23. Piers Brendon, *Winston Churchill, A Brief Life* (Toronto, 1984), 167.
24. Gilbert, *Churchill's Political Philosophy*, 82.
25. Ibid., 86.
26. Cited ibid., 88.
27. Bridges was secretary to the cabinet from 1938 onwards.
28. Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 5, *Closing Ring* (London, 1952), app. C, 571.

The bureaucratic response to the Harvard speech was slow to the point of immobility. Following a question concerning the progress on Basic in the Commons,[29] Churchill wrote to the secretary of state for India on 3 October 1943 expressing his shock at finding that the cabinet committee had not yet met: "The matter has become of great importance as Premier Stalin is also interested. If you feel the pressure of your other duties is too heavy on you, I will myself take on the duty of presiding over the committee, but I hope you will be able to relieve me of this."[30] Once in motion, however, the early signs were promising. The cabinet committee, in addition to the secretary of state for India, consisted of the secretary of state for the colonies, the president of the board of education, the minister of information, the secretary of the department of overseas trade, the parliamentary under-secretary of state for foreign affairs and the parliamentary secretary to the board of education.[31] In a confidential report of 6 December 1943 the committee announced that, in responding to its charge, which was "to consider whether action should be taken to promote the spread of Basic English, and, if so, to recommend a programme of action," it had considered a "great quantity" of evidence.[32] Doubtless using information supplied to it by Ogden, the committee justified the creation of this international auxiliary language out of "normal" English by observing that English is the world's "most widely diffused language":

> not only as the native tongue of some two hundred million people in the British Empire and the United States, but also as the administrative language and language of intercourse of nearly five hundred million more in India and the British Colonies, and increasingly becoming the foreign language most studied in other countries.[33]

The cabinet committee concluded that, while other methods might well be equally effective as a first step in teaching ordinary English, for business, science, and travel "definite encouragement should be given to the development of Basic English as an auxiliary international and administrative language...."[34] It recommended that Britain's diplomatic and commercial representatives, the British Council, the ministry of information, the colonial office, and the BBC should all make use of Basic and assist in its diffusion and that the Orthological Institute should be given "substantial financial assistance" in its task of translating a wide range of works into Basic. In order to work out the details of implementing its recommendations the cabinet committee set up an interdepartmental subcommittee,[35] a group which was to meet for the first time in May 1944.

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29. *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, v. 392, 22 September 1943.
30. Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, App. C, 587-88.
31. The membership list of the cabinet committee is taken from the *War Cabinet Report of Committee on Basic English*. Confidential White Paper W.P. (43) 551, 6 December 1943, p. 1. For much of the crown copyright material which follows, I am indebted to the BBC Written Archives, Reading, England, and in particular to Jacqueline Kavanagh and Margaret Prythergch.
32. *War Cabinet Report*, W.P. (43) 551, p. 1.
33. Ibid., p. 2.
34. Ibid., p. 5.
35. For information relating to the dates of meetings of the interdepartmental committee I was greatly assisted by Victorine F-Martineau, archivist of the British Council, London, and by Dr. W.T. Gordon of Dalhousie University.

In March 1944 Churchill formally reported the cabinet committee's findings and recommendations to Parliament and the same month, in response to one member's suggestion, arranged for his statement along with the recently signed Atlantic Charter to be printed as a White Paper[36] in their original forms and translated into Basic English for the purpose of comparison (Figure 1). Churchill sent copies of the white paper to

THE ATLANTIC CHARTER

Original Version

The President of the United States and the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, representing His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, being met together, deem it right to make known certain common principles in the national policies of their respective countries on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world.

First, their countries seek no aggrandisement, territorial or other.

Second, they desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned.

Third, they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.

Fourth, they will endeavour, with due respect for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment by all States, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity.

Fifth, they desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field, with the object of securing for all improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security.

Sixth, after the final destruction of Nazi tyranny, they hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want.

Seventh, such a peace should enable all men to traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance.

Eighth, they believe all of the nations of the world, for realistic as well as spiritual reasons, must come to the abandonment of the use of force. Since no future peace can be maintained if land, sea or air armaments continue to be employed by nations which threaten, or may threaten, aggression outside of their frontiers, they believe, pending the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security, that the disarmament of such nations is essential. They will likewise aid and encourage all other practicable measures which will lighten for peace-loving peoples the crushing burden of armaments.

Basic English Version

The President of the United States and the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, acting for his Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, being now together, are of the opinion that it is right to make public certain common ideas in the political outlook of their two countries, on which are based their hopes for a better future for all nations.

First, their countries will do nothing to make themselves stronger by taking more land or increasing their power in any other way.

Second, they have no desire for any land to be handed over the one nation to another without the freely voiced agreement of the men and women whose interests are in question.

Third, they take the view that all nations have the right to say what form of government they will have; and it is their desire to see their self-government and rights as independent nations given back to those from whom they have been taken away by force.

Fourth, they will do their best, while respecting their present undertakings, to make it possible for all nations, great or small, whichever side they were on in the war, to take part in the trade, equally, with others, and have the materials which are needed for the full development of their industry.

Fifth, it is their desire to get all nations working together in complete harmony in the field of trade and industry, so that all may be given better working conditions, have greater material well-being, and be certain of the necessaries of existence.

Sixth, after the complete destruction of the Nazi rule of force, it is their hope to see a peace made which will keep all nations safe from attack from outside, and which will make certain that all the men in all the lands will be free from fear and need through all their days.

Seventh, such a peace will have to make it possible for all men to go freely everywhere across the sea.

Eighth, it is their belief that all the nations of the earth, for material reasons no less than because it is right and good will, in the end, give up the use of force. Because war will come again if countries which are, or may be ready to make attacks on others go on using land, sea, or air power, it is their belief that it is necessary to take away all arms from them till a wider system of keeping the general peace, more solid in structure, comes into being.

They will, further, give their help and support to all other possible steps which may make the crushing weight of arms less for peace-loving nations.

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PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT ON BASIC ENGLISH ON MARCH 9, 1944

Original Version

The Committee of Ministers on Basic English, after hearing a considerable volume of evidence, have submitted a Report which has been approved in principle by His Majesty's Government. The Committee, in their report, distinguish between the use of a system such as Basic English as an auxiliary international language, and as a method for the teaching of ordinary English. In this latter field, several very promising methods, other than Basic, have been developed in recent years, which make use of progressively increasing vocabularies based on analysis of the words most frequently used in conversational and literary English. In foreign countries, the method used in the teaching of English will naturally be a matter for the decision of the Departments of Education of those countries, and, where teaching is

Basic English Version

The Committee of Ministers on Basic English, after hearing the views of a great number of experts, have made a statement on the question which has been given general approval by His Majesty's Government. It is pointed out by the Committee in their statement that the use of a system such as Basic English as an international second language is something quite separate from its use for the teaching of normal English. In this second field, two or three other systems which give signs of working very well have been produced in the last five or ten years. These make use of selections of words, increasing by stages, which are based on observation of the words most frequently used in talking and writing English. In other countries, the system used in the teaching of English will naturally be a question

4 2

Figure 1

The Atlantic charter and the Prime Minister's statement on Basic English in the original and Basic English versions. (H.M.S.O., Cmd. 6511.)

36. Issued as a White Paper March 1944, H.M.S.O., Cmd. 6511.

President Roosevelt who had expressed an interest in Basic when the two had met in the autumn of 1943. In his covering letter the prime minister observed that:

> If the U.S. authorities feel able to give their powerful support to the promotion of Basic English as a means of international intercourse I feel sure that would ensure its successful development. My conviction is that Basic English will then prove to be a great boon to mankind in the future and a powerful support to the influence of the Anglo Saxon people in world affairs.[37]

In his reply Roosevelt emphasized his continuing interest in Basic and indicated that he had instructed Cordell Hull[38] to sound out opinion on it in Congress. The president concluded, "Incidentally, I wonder what the course of history would have been if in May 1940 you had been able to offer the British people only blood, work, eye water, face water, which I understand is the best that Basic English can do with five (sic) famous words. Seriously, however, we are interested and will look into the matter thoroughly."[39]

Roosevelt was not alone in enjoying a little fun at Basic's expense. In April 1944 A.P.H. (probably A.P. Herbert)[40] in *Punch* tried his hand at the translations of some old favourites into Basic. Thus Hamlet's famous soliloquy emerged as:

> To be or not to be - that is the question,
> If it is best in the mind to undergo
> The stone-sending cords and sharp-pointed air-going instruments of unkind chance,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
> And, by standing in the way, put an end to them?

The more recent Churchillian classic, "Never, in the history of human conflict, was so much owed by so many to so few," was "punched" into this transposition: "Never, in the history of men's disagreement, did such great numbers have so great a debt to such small number."[41]

The interdepartmental committee met six times in 1944, and twice the following year.[42] Ogden, in his entry in *Who's Who* referred to the years 1944 to 1946 as those in which he was "bedevilled by officials"[43] and indeed the tangled combination of rival government departments and the often-difficult, always single-minded Ogden was not a fruitful one. Primary responsibility for giving effect to the recommendations of the cabinet committee was "entrusted to the Foreign Office, acting through the British

37. *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, III, *Alliance Declining, February 1944 - April 1945*, ed. with commentary by Warren F. Kimball (Princeton, [1984]), letter C-654/1, 20 April 1944, 105.
38. Cordell Hull was appointed secretary of state by Roosevelt in 1933 and resigned because of ill health in 1944.
39. *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, III, R-546/1, June [?], 1944, 154. Roosevelt had presciently observed to Hull that waiting for the views of "Competent Government Specialists" would "sound the death knell of Basic English."
40. A.P. Herbert served as the member of Parliament for Oxford University from 1935 to 1950. He was a regular contributor to *Punch*.
41. A.P.H., "Classics in Basic," *Punch or The London Charivari*, 26 April 1944.
42. Interdepartmental Committee on Basic English, *Report on the Year's Work*, Confidential [LC3345/8/453], 24 August 1945, from a copy in the BBC Written Archives, Reading. The chronology of the meetings has been compiled from material in the BBC Written Archives.
43. See Ogden entry in *Who Was Who*, 1951-1960, 829.

Council, with the assistance of the Inter-Departmental Committee." The interdepartmental committee's chairman, nominated by the British Council, was Professor B. Ifor Evans, to whom Ogden took an immediate and intense dislike. Representatives from the foreign office, the colonial office, the ministry of information, and the BBC as well as the British Council comprised its membership, with the dominions office and the India office "to be kept fully in touch.[44] Seemingly straight forward decisions became instantly enmired in Byzantine bureaucracy; the committee members recoiled in horror at the size of the financial commitment which Ogden regarded as minimal for the project's success, and, despite the good offices of Sir Percy Ashley,[45] Ogden's friend and an indefatigable advocate of Basic, negotiations for the establishment of a trust to administer the promised government funding dragged on and bogged down.

Ashley's sudden death in September of 1945[46] was preceded by an even more crippling blow to Basic's interests. In July of 1945 Churchill's coalition government went down to defeat and the new Labour ministry, more concerned, now that the war was over, with domestic reforms and social welfare, made little effort to realize Churchill's ambitions for Basic. Foreign minister Ernest Bevin, the responsible cabinet member, found much else to occupy his time although there were still enthusiasts in Parliament pressing for money and action.[47] The prevailing attitude at the BBC appears to have been gratitude that Churchill's departure had relieved its directors of the burden of promoting Basic. The director general, in a letter of 26 September 1945 to the controller of overseas services, observed: "I should think we could be more cautious than ever about Basic English now that Mr. Churchill has gone." The same controller, J.B. Clark, transmitted this news to directors and representatives in North America, New Delhi, the Middle East, Canada, Australia, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Paris: "It seems to us likely that the recent change of Government here may result in the whole question [of Basic English] being put on a high shelf in a dark corner."[48]

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44. Inter-Departmental Committee Report, 24 August 1945. The chairman of the British Council, Sir Malcolm Robertson, had made no secret of his opposition to Basic; see J. Lauwreys, "Basic English — its Position and Plans," in *C.K. Ogden: A Collective Memoir*, 164.

45. See the extensive correspondence between Ogden and Sir Percy Ashley in the Ogden Archive, McMaster University.

46. Ogden discusses Ashley's pivotal role in negotiations in an editorial in *The Basic News*, 10 (1950).

47. See, for example, the maiden speech of the member for Loughborough, Mr. Follick, in *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, v. 434, 11 March 1947.

48. For these references, from correspondence in the BBC Written Archives, Reading, I am indebted to Dr. W.T. Gordon. The Clark communique is dated 5 October 1945. Both William Empson and George Orwell had been involved in the early stages of the BBC's Basic diffusion programme. Empson remained supportive (see the correspondence in the Ogden Archive, McMaster University) but Orwell, although he responded favourably to the concept at first, became increasingly suspicious of such "totalitarian" devices and before the war's end he was transforming Basic into the savage parody which was to appear as the "Newspeak" of *Nineteen Eight-Four*. On Orwell's use of Basic see Howard Fink, "Newspeak: The Epitome of Parody Techniques in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*," *The Critical Survey* 5 (1971): 155-63.

With the establishment of the Basic English Foundation in the spring of 1947 "to propagate the teaching and study of Basic English as an international medium and thereby to increase the knowledge of English among mankind,"[49] a grant-in-aid was finally authorized under the auspices of the ministry of education but the civil estimates reveal that it only amounted to £18,600[50] to be "used solely to assist the activities of the foundation in this country, e.g., in maintaining the standards of the Basic system and increasing the supply of books in Basic for purchase and use abroad."[51]

A somewhat expanded publishing programme was far from the all-out effort for Basic which seemed to be forthcoming in the heady days of 1943 and it was with a sense of salvaging what he could from the wreckage of this hopes that Ogden accepted a token payment of £23,000 for his work on the project,[52] a sum, not coincidentally, identical to the amount Jeremy Bentham received from a much earlier but no less short-sighted British government in recompense for this efforts in devising the abortive Panopticon prison.[53] Government grants, through the Basic English Foundation, slowed to a trickle and then ceased entirely by the early 1950s[54] but, despite uncertain and inadequate funding, Basic continued to make significant strides in India, Africa, the Far East, Russia, and Eastern Europe.[55] The Orthological Institute continued (indeed it continues in London to this day), but Ogden's grand design for Basic as the one language of international communication and understanding was never to be realized.

It has been suggested here that Ogden's concept had recommended itself to Churchill for its efficiency in improving communication both during wartime and afterwards, a "grand convenience for us all to be able to move freely about the world. . . to be able to find everywhere a medium. . . of intercourse and understanding."[56] However, it is also apparent that from the first the prime minister had clearly seen the wider potential of Basic English: to a member in the house who had interrupted his statement on Basic by asking "what about winning the war?" Churchill had snapped back: "This is in connection with winning the peace."[57] He had seen its specific application in assisting in the preservation, in some form, of the scattered remnants of Britain's empire.

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49. The establishment of the Basic English Foundation was announced in Parliament by the minister of education; see *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, v. 434, 11 March 1947.
50. Civil Estimates for the Year Ending 31 March 1948, HMSO, 18 February 1947, section D.3, Grants in Aid.
51. *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, v. 434, 11 March 1947.
52. Ibid., v. 437, 6 May 1947.
53. The profound influence of Bentham's thought upon Ogden's work has been noted above. Ogden also developed a word wheel to illustrate the relationship between the various components of the sentence which he called the Panopticon.
54. Lauwerys asserts that the Basic English Foundation received some £100.000 in government funding over six years [1947-1952]; *C.K. Ogden: A Collective Memoir*, 165.
55. The issue of *The Basic News* (no. 10) published in 1950 after a ten-year hiatus demonstrates, as does Ogden's vast unpublished correspondence, how widely Basic had spread throughout the world.
56. Winston S. Churchill, *Onwards to Victory*, 236.
57. The questioner was Earl Winterton. *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, v. 434, 9 March 1944.

More than a decade before Churchill had been won to the cause of Basic English, a charge of what amounted to linguistic imperialism had been levied at Basic by the Esperantists: "The importance of neutrality is fundamental. No nation wishes to see the language of any other nation placed in a position of superiority... [and] the last thing we desire is to adopt a national language for international purposes and so establish a cultural and ultimately a political domination of one nation over all the rest."[58] Ogden had responded with typical astringency to such an emotion-tinged argument:

> As English is even now the language of almost one-third of all living persons, the development of an international language from English is quite natural. There is little danger that England will get political power over other countries because 850 words are in international use; or that America, Canada, Africa or India will ever become dependent on England through their use of the same 850![59]

Although he nowhere gave voice to it, for to do so would have been to sound Basic's death knell, Churchill may well have also had in mind the establishment of precisely that cultural domination which the Esperantists most feared. By the early 1940s he was coming to recognise, however reluctantly, that effective economic and political control, and even political influence, over Britain's former imperial possessions, must be gradually surrendered. However, he continued to nourish the hope that the democratic ideals and cultural traditions which Britain had so freely disseminated during the nineteenth century might somehow be kept vital and continue to influence its former possessions for the better. Such a situation might be achieved, in part at least, through the continuing link of a shared language. Indeed, the success of Ogden's scheme might well have created an intellectual empire which would have eclipsed anything which had gone before with an infusion of Basic-English speakers extending from the Far East to the United States.

What would have been the fate of Basic had Churchill not so precipitately fallen from office in the summer of 1945 is open to speculation. It is at least possible that post-imperial Britain might have assumed a very different face and that, as the Commonwealth fed upon the bones of what once had been, the mother country might better have been able to preserve the less tangible but more precious empire which Churchill had envisioned. In that Harvard speech of September 1943, having outlined in glowing terms the possibilities of Basic English, he exhorted his listeners: "Let us go forward in malice to none and good will to all. Such plans offer far better prizes than taking away other people's provinces or lands or grinding them down in exploitation. The empires of the future are the empires of the mind."[60]

58. F.B. Bourdillon, "Esperanto," *Service in Life and Work* 1:3 (Autumn 1932): 32-33.
59. C.K. Ogden, "Parthian Shafts," ibid., 36.
60. Winston S. Churchill, *Onwards to Victory*, 238.